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AUTHOR Herr, Edwin L.; Gysbers, Norman C.
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ABSTRACT

In the United States, three levels of government (federal, state, and local) influence the nature, structure, and delivery of career guidance and counseling. Career guidance and programs are available to individuals of all ages and circumstances. Due to the different sets of guidelines at the different levels of government, the diffuse nature of career development services in the United States causes there to be no one policy on career development services. Policy is often a result of compromise between various forces committed to affecting specific outcomes. Several policy issues arise at the education level since policies are produced at the federal level and states are responsible for education. There are essentially no policies requiring career guidance in the workplace, although recent legislative acts (e.g., Americans for Disabilities Act) were created to ensure equality in the workplace. Three key issues for the future are depoliticization, life-cycle approach to policy and career service provision, and more comprehensive coordination and integration of services across settings and governmental levels. Several actions are identified for the future, including examination of policies at the three levels of government, and development of models tailored to life-cycle approaches that include use of integrated services. (Contains 10 references.) (JDM)

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By

Edwin L. Herr
Norman C. Gysbers

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20. CAREER DEVELOPMENT SERVICES AND RELATED POLICY ISSUES: THE U.S. EXPERIENCE

Edwin L. Herr, The Pennsylvania State University
Norman C. Gysbers, University of Missouri-Columbia

Context

In the United States, three levels of government influence the nature, structure and delivery of career guidance and counselling programs and services for children, adolescents and adults: federal, state and local governments (city councils, school boards and country officials). All three initiate policies and programs to meet the career development needs of their clientele. Sometimes, they work together. For example, federal legislation may provide funding to state and local governments which support local programming for career guidance and counselling. Sometimes, one level of government acts alone. For example, local school boards may create policies and provide funding to support the development and implementation of comprehensive guidance programs in their districts without support from federal or state government.

Various departments and agencies exist within each level of government that, by law or policy, may contribute to the nature, structure and delivery of career guidance and counselling programs and services. For example, at the federal level, the departments responsible for education, labour, commerce, health and human services, and defence may be directed by legislation to play some part in the education, and employment and training systems that support and deliver career guidance and counselling at national, state and local levels. Departments and agencies at the state level may play some required or voluntary role in providing career guidance and counselling programs and services at the state and local levels, and in determining who will deliver them and for whom they will be offered (i.e., unemployed persons, welfare recipients, persons with disabilities). In addition, federal legislation may require the establishment of state, regional or local boards for specific initiatives.

Several efforts have been made over the last 25 years to co-ordinate some of the activities and services that support the provision of career guidance and counselling to children, young people and adults. Of particular concern was the need to co-ordinate the delivery of career and labour market information among various federal and state departments and agencies. To accomplish this, the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) and the State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees were established by the *Vocational Education Amendments* of 1976.

Subsequent legislation reinforced and expanded the primary mission and objectives of the national and state committees, with a growing emphasis on career development. In 1991, the NOICC Career Development Training Institute was established by Congress. Congress defined its purpose as to "train personnel in assisting students to understand themselves in the context of their career development, to be aware of the world of work, to understand the linkage between academic skills and work-related skills, and to make effective career decisions" (Lester, 1992).

Given the above, what can we say about the nature and structure of the systems that shape and direct the delivery of career guidance and counselling to individuals in the United States? Herr (1996: 16) described the system as an "uncoordinated mosaic." In other words, the system in the United States is largely decentralized, resulting in uneven provision of career guidance and counselling programs and services.

Having said this, it is important to remember that the constitution of the United States creates a natural tension between federal and state departments and agencies because of how it delegates authority. The constitution does not identify education as among those areas for which the federal government has responsibility. In instances where the constitution is silent, the responsibility lies with state and local government. So it is with education. Education is a state responsibility, not a federal responsibility. Yet we have certain mandates resulting from national legislation that must be followed at the state and local levels. Sometimes, state and local officials and practitioners see these mandates as intrusive, and sometimes they are seen as facilitative. A similar tension also exists between state departments and agencies and local entities. Here too, some state mandates are seen as intrusive while others are facilitative.

Current Provisions

In the United States, career guidance and counselling programs and services are available, albeit unevenly, to individuals of all ages and circumstances, through a variety of departments, agencies and boards at the state and local levels. Funding for these programs and services comes from federal and state legislation as well as local boards of education. Two federal acts (the *Workforce Investment Act* of 1998 and the *Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Amendments* of 1998), plus other legislation focussing on disabilities, rehabilitation and employment concerns, provide major support for the public network of career guidance and counselling programs and services in the United States.

During the last several years, attempts have been made at the federal level to consolidate many public programs dealing with employment and training. The *Workforce Investment Act* of 1998, for example, eliminates more

than 60 smaller training programs and streamlines the requirements of the major grant programs that support training and related services, including career guidance and counselling for disadvantaged youth, adults and dislocated workers. Through this act, as well as previous federal Department of Labor efforts, one-stop centres are established that require state and local governments to offer the public a single point of access to federal job training and education programs. One-stop centres must make the following core services available to all adults, regardless of income or employment status:

- initial assessment of skills, aptitudes, abilities, interests and service needs;
- job search and placement assistance, including career counselling when appropriate;
- labour market and other information to support decision making, including job listings and the skills necessary to obtain these jobs, local occupations in demand and their skill requirements, the availability of support services and information on the performance of authorized training providers; and
- follow-up services, including counselling, for individuals placed in employment.

The work of one-stop centres and related federal initiatives has been buttressed by a growing number of innovative uses of the Internet to disseminate national information about educational and occupational opportunities, such as America's Job Bank, America's Talent Bank and America's Learning Exchange.

In public elementary and secondary schools, the concept of comprehensive guidance programs, including the provision of career guidance and counselling for all students, is rapidly taking hold (Gysbers and Henderson, 1994; Sink and MacDonald, 1998). Sink and MacDonald (1998) estimate that by the close of this decade, 34 or more states will have implemented comprehensive school guidance programs or will be in the process of doing so. This means that, increasingly, children and young people from kindergarten through Grade 12 in a majority of states are participating in career guidance and counselling activities and services through the guidance curriculum, individual planning and responsive services that are components of comprehensive guidance and counselling.

The importance of comprehensive guidance programs was affirmed in the *Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act* of 1984 and subsequently in the *Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act* of 1990. In section 521(4) of the 1984 Perkins Act, career guidance and counselling were defined as follows:

> The term "career guidance and counselling" means those programs (A) which pertain to the body of subject matter and related techniques and methods organized for the development in individuals of career awareness, career planning, career decision making, placement skills and knowledge and understanding of local, state, and national occupational, education, and labor market needs, trends, and opportunities, and (B) which assist them in making and implementing informed educational and occupational choices.

In 1986, the NOICC began a major initiative in the United States, in collaboration with leaders in the counselling profession, to strengthen and enhance comprehensive competency-based career counselling, guidance and education programs. That effort led to the establishment of the National Career Development Guidelines directed to developing comprehensive career guidance programs at all education levels. The guidelines are grouped into three categories: self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning (Lester, 1992). The Guidelines have been endorsed by major professional associations and adopted in more than 46 states, as well as in Canada and Japan. The Guidelines also are the basis for the career development standards of the National Standards for School Counselling Programs developed by the American School Counsellors Association.

Comprehensive guidance programs in the school make a contribution to the career development needs of our children and young people. For example, Lapan et al. (1997) found that students in schools with more fully implemented guidance programs reported that they earned higher grades, their education was better preparing them for the future, their school made more career and college information available to them and their school had a more positive climate. Similarly, Nelson and Gardner (1998) found that students in school in Utah with more fully implemented guidance programs rated their overall education as better, took more advanced mathematics and science courses, and had higher scores on every area of the American College Testing (ACT) college entrance examination.

Some form of career guidance and counselling activities and services are provided at most post-secondary institutions (post-secondary vocational-technical schools, community colleges and four-year colleges and universities). While their primary audience is their own students, many of these institutions also offer similar services to community members. More information is contained in the *Journal of Career Development*, Volume 25, Number 2, Winter 1998, a thematic issue titled "Expanding Career Service Impact in the 21st Century Through Innovation, Outreach, and Organizational Change." It describes career services at a large mid-western university being provided to students as well as adults in the community.

Providing career guidance and counselling activities and services is not only an agency or educational institution responsibility. Many companies provide career guidance and counselling, or career development as they might label it, to employees through their human resource development offices. There also are private consulting firms that contract with companies to provide career assessment, outplacement career counselling and in-house training to career service providers. Outplacement career counselling is provided as companies merge and downsize. Counsellors in independent practice often provide outplacement counselling under contract to companies. Frequently, independent career counsellors or counselling psychologists are hired by companies to work with troubled employees in employment assistance programs. Independent career counsellors or psychologists also offer services for fees to individuals considering career change, experiencing work adjustment problems or wanting to explore other career issues.

The education that career personnel receive ranges from formal training leading to a master's or doctoral degree at a college or university, to short-term training before beginning work, to on-the-job training. The National Career Development Association has conducted several analyses of the competencies needed to provide career guidance and counselling. These competency documents have been used as the basis for developing courses and experiential training experiences for career counsellors. Many professionals have expressed concern about accreditation for training programs and the credential process for practitioners. Accreditation of training programs is usually done through the Council for the Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and the American Psychological Association (APA). Licensure is a state matter; therefore, each state decides whether or not to license psychologists or professional counsellors. The National Board for Certified Counsellors (NBCC) is a voluntary national effort to certify counsellors, including career counsellors, based on meeting certain requirements and passing an examination.

There is a myriad of informal training available, usually short term or on the job. Some of this training is augmented by information provided in hardcopy, software, video and Internet sources. In many agencies, little training is given to people who are providing career guidance and counselling services to clients. To respond to this lack of training, the NOICC is partnering with the National Career Development Association to deliver a 120-hour paraprofessional career development facilitator curriculum. A network of qualified trainers provides both face-to-face and Internet-based training. Career development facilitators are being certified through the Center for Credentialing and Education, a subsidiary of the National Board for Certified Counsellors. The NOICC also supported the development of the Improved Career Decision Making (ICDM) curriculum,

which trains professional and support staff to help people use labour market information to make thoughtful, responsible and enlightened decisions about occupations and careers.

Current Policy Issues

The diffuse and decentralized nature of career development services in the United States is, at least partially, a function of a diffuse set of policy and legislative guidelines at the federal, state and local levels. There is no one policy on career development services. The policies and legislative guidelines emanate from various federal agencies and state governments as well as from the recommendations of quasi-governmental task forces and from standards formulated by professional organizations. Since neither federal nor state governments currently have major research initiatives designed to evaluate the impact of legislation or policies on career development services, policies and legislation are frequently influenced by "special interests" and professional groups. Thus, it is sometimes difficult to trace the origin of specific government policy and legislation because they originated in blue ribbon panels and advocacy groups outside of government. This reality is a function of the permeability of the political process in the United States by which policy and legislation is forged, deliberated and adopted. At every step of the policy development process, professional associations (e.g., National Career Development Association), persons outside of government representing consumers of policy and providers of services, as well as persons within government, can influence the course and content of policy and the subsequent legislation which often results. In this sense, policy is often a result of compromise between various forces committed to affecting specific outcomes.

A related policy issue is the political partisanship that frequently accompanies the formulation of federal and state policy. The two major political parties vying for government leadership at national or state level bring to their election on two-, four- or six-year intervals, different agendas concerning the important functions of government, the use of public resources, what groups in society are most vulnerable and need help through legislation, and how and by whom government goals should be met. In macro terms, the political agenda of whichever political party is in power will likely be influenced by current economic and social trends, for example, the rise of the global economy, the end of the Cold War, international trade status and the ability of the American work force to compete and be productive vis-à-vis the work forces of other nations. At a micro level, the provision of career development services becomes one, among many, possible processes likely to be useful in advancing a current political agenda, for example, assisting persons with disabilities or at economic disadvantage and on welfare to obtain the skills to become productive taxpayers, and helping persons dislocated from their jobs by the

dynamics of international trade agreements or corporate reorganizations to be retrained for new and emerging occupations.

When career guidance and counselling programs and services are seen as part of the solution to helping persons choose, prepare for and engage in employment, these career development services become socio-political processes defined to advance a particular set of policy goals. Within such contexts, the expectations and language of career guidance and counselling may differ depending on whether career development services are seen as an independent method of achieving specific policy goals or as a component of a more complex program of interventions. In some legislation (e.g., *The School to Work Opportunities Act* of 1994, *Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act* of 1990) career guidance and counselling, are described as a program, which according to the Perkins Act of 1990, is organized and administered by certified counsellors and designed to assist individuals to achieve a set of specified outcomes (i.e., acquire self-assessment, career planning, decision making and employability skills, make the transition from education and training to work, etc.). Subsequent amendments to the Perkins Act removed the phrase "organized and administered by certified counsellors" but retained the concept of a career guidance and counselling program. Thus, while the importance of career development services continued to be advocated in this legislation, it diminished the importance of trained counsellors as the people who should deliver such services. This provided the opportunity for other professionals, not necessarily trained in career guidance or counselling, to provide such services. Other legislation, for example that of the Rehabilitation Services Administration or the Veteran's Administration, tends to be less specific about whether career guidance and counselling should be organized as a program with specific outcomes, but rather describes them as separate services that are important in combination with training, financial benefits and other interventions.

A related policy issue at the federal and state levels is the existence of many separate departments (e.g., Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, Defense, etc.). Each department has its own constituencies (e.g., students, workers, children, youth, families, persons with disabilities, persons in the military services, veterans) for whom they independently recommend policies and levels of funding. As new groups who need governmental support are identified, they tend to be assigned to specific federal or state departments and become the focus of different pieces of legislation. Virtually all federal and many state departments have some entitlement to provide career development services for children, youth or adults, or some specific population subset including those who are economically disadvantaged, Native Americans, migrant workers, the elderly, persons with physical and mental disabilities, unemployed individuals, those who have experienced a job dislocation, military veterans, welfare recipients and ex-offenders. As separate policies and legislation originate in different

government agencies, they tend not to be co-ordinated with legislation that already exists or emanates from other federal or state departments. Therefore, the diversity of legislation that originates in separate federal or state agencies may inadvertently divide rather than integrate the policies that influence and support the provision of career guidance and counselling programs and services across populations. Even though they may be directed at the same population, for example, at risk youth, they may serve different purposes, and be provided by different practitioners, in different settings.

Current federal policy issues also can be cast in other terms. For example, career development services in rehabilitation or employment counselling settings in each state are decentralized extensions of federal policy, and money flows directly from the responsible federal agency to the state offices responsible for such services. Thus, career guidance and counselling specialists in employment and training, rehabilitation or veteran's affairs may work in isolation from specialists in other federally supported agencies having similar purposes and overlapping constituencies. For more than two decades, the NOICC has been the one federal organization charged with integrating career guidance and counselling services for children, youth and adults across the federal departments of Education, Labor and Defense. Unfortunately, in the past several months, the NOICC has been dismantled as a federal co-ordinating unit, as a result of a political agenda shaped both by special interest groups and support for consolidation of programs.

There is a further policy issue in educational settings. While the federal government has produced policies, legislation and funding support for career guidance and counselling programs and services in the schools, states are responsible for education. In most states, local boards of education are the final arbiters of the programs and services to be offered. Beyond established minimums in educational provisions, which differ from state to state, local school boards can define the availability of vocational education and training, career guidance and counselling programs and services, and related processes that will or will not be provided in a particular school district. In general, states and local communities can avoid accepting federal funds for specific educational or career guidance and counselling provisions, and thus avoid having to implement the policies and recommendations that such funds support. On the other hand, states can submit proposals to compete for selected federal funds for specific career guidance and counselling initiatives, but may not be selected to receive such services. For these reasons, the resources, availability and training of school counsellors, as well as the purposes of career guidance and counselling programs and services, can vary dramatically from state to state, urban to rural area and across communities. Thus, where students live and go to school has much to do with the comprehensiveness of the programs and services they receive. Depending on local school board decisions and

funding provisions, some students can be disadvantaged by a lack of access to career guidance or counselling, while students in other locations have a comprehensive program of career guidance and counselling services available to them at each educational level and in the community.

Federal and state policies and legislation related to the provision of career services tend to be less comprehensive in colleges and universities. Although the *Higher Education Act Amendments*, for example, support the provision of career development services in colleges and universities, the impact is less apparent than the impact of professional policies and guidelines such as the *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Student Services/Development Programs* (1986) or the *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Career Planning and Placement* (1988). The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) is a consortium of 21 professional associations in higher education that collectively devise and publish the standards and guidelines that recommend criteria for evaluating some 16 components of student services in colleges and universities, including components dealing with career planning and placement (Herr et al., 1993).

Somewhat similar are federal and state policies related to the provision of career services in the workplace. There are essentially no policy or legislative mandates requiring career guidance and counselling in workplaces in the United States, although, there are legislative provisions which affect the workplace. The *Americans for Disabilities Act* is intended to ensure that persons with disabilities are provided with appropriate opportunities and support services to be able to work, including career guidance and counselling. Other policy and legislation provides career development services in support of workers' retraining and career development as they are assisted to choose, prepare for and adjust to employment. Examples are the *Rehabilitation Act Amendments* through which persons with disabilities can access rehabilitation counsellors who engage in career counselling, job development, job readiness and job placement, which requires systematic relationships with employers. Another example is the *Workforce Investment Act* of 1998 (first enacted in 1982 and amended subsequently) which provides job training, literacy and skill training, and career development services to economically disadvantaged youths and adults and others who face serious barriers to employment.

Key Issues for the Future

Although there are many provisions for career guidance and counselling programs and services in the United States, they tend to be fragmented and uneven in their availability. They are not systematically co-ordinated or integrated and, frequently, they are not sustained across time, due to the dynamics occasioned by changes in political administration. There also are voids in the populations served. This context raises at least three key issues

for the future: depoliticization, the life-cycle approach to policy and career service provision, and more comprehensive co-ordination and integration of services across settings and governmental levels.

Depoliticization

Policy, legislation and funding for career guidance and counselling programs and services for children, youth and adults in the United States are subject to a political and social agenda which is in considerable flux from one national administration to another, from one state to another and from one locale to another. In the future, sustained and comprehensive policy will be required to give direction and substance to the delivery of career guidance and counselling programs and services for all populations and across settings: schools, community agencies, colleges and universities, and work.

To provide comprehensive career development policy that is long term, that charts provisions to be implemented by career specialists in different settings, with funding systematically allocated by federal, state and local sources, requires a bipartisan, depoliticized approach. Unless this ensues, it is unlikely that a core of career development services can be formulated and sustained for all citizens in all regions of the nation. Such depoliticized support must provide for sufficient flexibility in the provision of services that can accommodate:

- an occupational structure in rapid transformation;
- the changing demographic profile of the work force;
- immigration and cross-national mobility in a global economy; and
- educational and organizational shifts related to the pervasive application of advanced technology in homes, schools and workplaces (Herr, 1995).

Life-Cycle Approach

As suggested by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development (1985: 6), "public policy often tends to segment problems artificially by age group or subject matter." This observation seems to describe the current state of policy on career guidance and counselling programs and services in the United States. In contrast, a life-cycle approach to public policy in career services would identify where there are voids in public policy and where there are redundancies in the provision of career guidance and counselling for some populations. Such an approach would review and connect policies that are now fragmented, piecemeal and in need of modification. According to Herr (1995: 266-267):

> Such an approach to public policy would articulate the delivery of career counselling and career guidance services intergenerationally, based upon what is known about the salient needs for career maturity and adaptability from one life-stage to another. In essence, public policy would address the unique career guidance needs of

> children and youth as they explore and anticipate work, develop general employability skills and engage in career planning, would provide programs that facilitate the transition from school to work; would facilitate work adjustment, retraining, and career change; and would help workers to plan for retirement or reduced labor-force involvement as they age.... What would result from a life-cycle approach to career [services] is a matrix of areas for public-policy intervention that would connect life stages, populations, settings and other relevant policy initiatives.

Co-ordination and Integration of Services across Settings and Government Levels

In addition to depoliticization and a life-cycle approach, there is the need for co-ordination and integration of career services across settings and government levels. Public policy at the federal level must connect with public policy at state and local levels and vice versa. Similarly, as voids in public policy are identified and life-cycle approaches are considered, counsellors must be made available and their services must be co-ordinated. In any locale, counsellors in schools, employment services, rehabilitation agencies and other settings must take each other into account, and public policy must support the systematic integration of the skills each of these counsellors have, rather than divide and isolate these professionals. In this regard, employers and workplaces need to be seen as part of a continuum of career guidance and counselling programs and services, not separate from and unrelated to such provisions.

Action Steps

Based on the context in the United States and the issues discussed above, several action steps can be identified:

- Secure a federal grant to:
  - identify existing policy and legislative initiatives in career guidance and counselling programs and services at federal, state and local levels;
  - identify redundancies, discontinuities and voids in such support; and
  - recommend correctives by which to bring language, entitlements and action into concert.
- Secure a foundation or government grant to create a national forum to:
  - address the adequacy of public policy relative to a life-cycle approach to career guidance and counselling programs and services;
  - seek ways to achieve a bipartisan approach to such public policy; and
  - clarify the outcomes desired from such an articulation of public policy in career services.

- Analyze the current provision of career guidance and counselling programs and services by counsellors by settings, in order to inventory the available expertise and identify gaps.

- Synthesize available research about how the delivery of career guidance and counselling programs and services can be effectively articulated across settings and across a matrix of developmental and work adjustment concerns.

- Determine a core set of career guidance and counselling initiatives tailored to diverse populations defined by gender, age and special needs across the life cycle.

- Develop models of locally co-ordinated career guidance and counselling programs and services tailored to a life-cycle approach that includes the use of integrated services in all appropriate settings including schools and one-stop centres.

- Continue the international initiative of the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) and the Educational Resources Information Center/Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse (ERIC/CASS) to offer an online comprehensive system for storing and disseminating career resources by means of the International Career Development Library (ICDL).

- Determine the training needs of career counsellors and other career development specialists, and develop methods in residential centres or by distance learning to meet the training needs.

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Endnote

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